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# UNSETTLED QUESTIONS IN THE ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE SCHOOLS

An address

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# UNSETTLED QUESTIONS IN THE ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE SCHOOLS

There are certain fundamentals of the American educational system which, it may well be said, are settled. They are settled by common thinking and universal acceptance; by legislative sanction and judicial determination. They are looked upon as the necessary basis of our political system; as the essential support, guardian and guide of a democratic form of government.

## Some matters settled

It is settled first or all, for example, that our schools are to be free. They are to be supported at the common cost. All property is to contribute its share. They are to be open to all. There is to be nothing about them to which any may justly object on conscientious grounds. They are to be managed and their particular character and accommodations determined and provided by the people in primary assemblages or by officers chosen by the people. It is accepted that they are subject to the legislative power in each state because they are supported by taxation and the power of taxation is a sovereign power which can be exercised only by the Legislature. The legislative power which levies taxes must account for the manner in which the revenues are used. This logically results in very considerable legislative control and direction over the schools, but the local interest in the schools is so great and so jealous of prerogative that the legislative powers go only to general and vital principles, while the real organizing, housing and administration of the schools are, and are likely to remain, local. It is settled that the power of the state shall undertake to assure a suitable school within accessible distance of every home and that each local community shall elaborate and embellish its particular school as far as the majority rule will authorize or permit. It is settled that there shall be a free high school in every considerable town and a free university in every state unless an endowed university is already upon the ground and in some measure meets the public needs. It is settled that all grades of schools shall articulate together with some exactness; that instruction shall be continuous from the primary school to the graduate school in the university, and that all pupils shall be

encouraged to go as far and as high as they will. It is fundamental, though it has not always been so, that girls shall have the same rights as boys in the schools. It is settled that the Legislature may provide for training teachers, and establish the methods, the standards, and the authority for determining their qualifications; it is further settled also that the Legislature may go as far as it pleases in appropriating moneys directly to the support of the schools or in fixing the sums which localities must raise, absolutely or conditionally; and may go further and create such supervising officers and such machinery for promoting effective teaching as it pleases.

The vital American principle that there shall be no organic or financial relation between the state and any church, between a school supported in whole or in part by taxation and any sectarian interest, has a decisive bearing upon the affairs of the public schools. The state will encourage every movement or enterprise which promises to be of advantage to any factor in the population by giving its sanction and approval thereto, but it will not enter into any business or moneyed relation with any class or faction as against any other, and it will not divest itself of any part of its power and function to deal with all sectional, class, religious or partizan interests with exact and impartial justice. Accordingly, the public schools are common to all, must avoid all entanglements, and, in the fullest practicable measure, must be of equal advantage to all.

It is not possible, nor desirable, to enumerate all of the foundation principles of the common school system. They are easily traceable to the essential principles of our federal and state Constitutions, to the settled doctrines of the common law and to the uncontroverted usages which have grown up in the thought and the public life of this country. Wherever the developing educational system comes in contact with these headlands of our political theory and our system of jurisprudence it will be well to understand at once that the educational system will have to adjust itself to them. These fundamental principles are well "settled," and, so far as the features and phases of the school system relate to such principles, they will have to be considered "settled" also.

Aside from this, nothing is settled beyond recall and nothing has gone beyond the possibility of a change. Indeed, the adaptability and effectiveness of the schools depend upon unceasing modifications which are in keeping with the new conditions which are constantly arising, the new educational experiences which continually crowd upon us, and the new purposes and outlooks which are every day opening up to us.

We can not too often point out that our educational progress is measured by the freedom and confidence with which we do things,

provided we keep sane, have proper respect for what our predecessors have done, and do not make changes for our own diversion or for the mere sake of a change. Men who would make a minor position in the school system the means of attracting attention or gaining notoriety, men who can destroy and not construct, men who are more ambitious than useful, often make trouble by supporting all sorts of changes in the schools. That is one of the difficulties with which a democracy has to contend. But that is only a difficulty in administration, and not a real question in constructive or administrative policy. Happily, the school system has gone beyond the point where such men can do it much harm. They are powerless to do much good or harm. Any real problem in the organization and administration of the schools will have to be met by experts in education—men and women who know the history and have studied the philosophy of education, who realize the underrunning currents of American life, and are desirous of shaping the schools to the purposes of a nation which is bound to give every one his chance and whose public policies and educational instrumentalities must aid and encourage every child of the republic to make the most of his chance. Such men and women need not fear to take the initiative in meeting any new questions which may arise in the school system, or to make any changes which, after discussion, are supported by anything like a consensus of opinion. The life and virility of the educational system depend upon their doing so.

I am to suggest—but must leave it to you to settle,—if they are to be at once settled—some of the problems which now seem to confront the American school system. Presenting them with sufficient detail to disclose their reality, I shall not feel called upon to sustain one view or another with arguments, or even to indicate any opinion of my own concerning their solution.

## State and local control of the schools

It is an open question how much initiative and control shall be exerted by the state and how much shall be left to the locality, concerning the schools. Of course, since the public school system has come to be supported by taxation and the power of taxation can not be exercised except by the sovereign authority of a state, there is no question about the state having ample power to do what it will about the schools. But there is very serious question about the measure of direction which the state ought to impose. People learn to do by doing. An officer bearing the appointment and exercising the authority of the state may know more about educational organization and administration than a local school meeting or local official may be expected to know, or, knowing, may be able to do. He may do

things better than they will be done without him. Yet, if he initiates and supervises everything, the people will come to depend upon him, and will invariably look to the state to do what would broaden and strengthen them if they would do for themselves. On the other hand, people need educational intrusion from the outside. It often happens that a community thinks that it has the very best schools when it has almost the worst. The difficulty is that it can not see, and of course it can not do. How are state control and local self-initiative and administration to be balanced with the best results?

### State and local support of the schools

Very akin to this question is another, as to the measure of money which the state should provide for the support of the schools, and the amount which should be left to each city, town or district to supply. In many states the support of the schools is left altogether to the locality. In others a very considerable sum is distributed annually on some basis which requires the stronger sections to aid in some measure the weaker ones, and so equalize educational advantages over the state. The city of New York, for example, pays annually about a million and a quarter of dollars to aid other sections of the state which are financially weaker. Of the legal competency of the Legislature to exact this there can be no question. Of the substantial aid to the rural districts of the state there is no doubt. But people are never satisfied with the amount of money which they get for nothing. The more they get the more they demand, the more they come to depend upon it, and the less they will be willing to raise for themselves. It is clear enough to me that in education the stronger and wealthier sections of a state ought to help the weaker and poorer ones. But, in justice to themselves, the weaker ones should not be allowed to take all they will. How are the state and the local support to be adjusted so as to assure the best schools in every section and promote the highest interests of an entire commonwealth?

### The distribution of state funds

Again, if the state is to raise and distribute funds for the support of local schools, how is the distribution to be adjusted as between the primary, secondary and higher schools? There are some precious souls who, if they are in favor of anything educationally, think they are for the "three R's" exclusively, or, at most, they are for anything beyond the "three R's" only when the need of their being for it has wholly passed away. Yet we know very well that a mere ability to read and write and cipher does not now sustain intellectual life and democratic institutions anywhere in this country; and we know quite as well that the excellence of the primary schools is

dependent upon the prevalence and efficiency of the secondary schools. Schools are of little worth without schools above them: thus it is to the very limits of knowledge and of teaching power. But the secondary schools are more costly than the elementary schools, and the higher are more expensive than the secondary. How is the state to use its power so as to balance the school system, assure an equitable distribution to the different grades and so secure the best results which wisdom can devise?

### The teaching force

Yet again, how is the teaching force to be made the best possible? There are more who want to teach than there are places. The pay is not large, but the work allows considerable leisure and satisfies pride. The unprepared ones are to be shut out. But who are prepared and who are unprepared? Some who know less that is found in books than others do are better teachers than the others are. Surely, some who are not very successful in passing examinations are acceptable teachers. Some definite scholastic attainments are necessary, according to grade. Some general culture is imperative, regardless of grade. What parent wants to send his child to a coarse and mannerless teacher, no matter how much he knows of some things? Some professional training in educational theory and in teaching methods is requisite. Then there is the matter of spirit and finally of adaptability. But this refers to the individual teacher. How is the morale of the whole force to be uplifted? It can not be done through indifference and inattention. It will not move forward of its own motion. It can not be done through political officers who know less themselves than they are bound to exact of the teachers. It can not be done through examinations alone, and it can not be done without examinations. It can not be done with a rush, and it can not be done through harshness to worthy and deserving teachers. It is a matter of sound plan, steadily followed for a long time. How is the plan to be determined upon, and by what method is it to be carried to a meritorious conclusion?

### The supervision of the schools

Then there is always the unsettled question of competent supervision. The office of school superintendent is an American creation. In other constitutional countries the schools do not attempt as much as ours do; the teachers are men with life tenure who follow the instructions of the government minister of education in all things; the work is routine; the habit of attendance by young children in primary schools is universal; there is no mixing of classes and no articulation of schools, and the results place the percentage of illiteracy lower than in this country. With us the curriculum is

long and diversified; we instruct all classes of children and we do it in the same schools; our teaching force is changeable, not so professional in character and often overtaxed. We have tried to overcome difficulties by general supervision, and in a measure we have succeeded. But the really professional superintendent is largely without legal authority, and the political superintendent, who often survives in the rural districts, is frequently without professional efficiency. Generally speaking, wherever there is a professional superintendent he is subject to an unprofessional board which is not without self-confidence in all that concerns the schools. In a word, we have to contend with the disadvantages of democratic government, and that fact sometimes obscures the other fact, particularly to teachers, that there are more advantages than disadvantages in government by the people.

### The prerogatives of school superintendents

The legal and authoritative prerogatives of school superintendents, both in city and country, is an unsettled matter in American education. Under the prevailing conditions, and conditions which are inherent and not quickly to be changed, supervision is highly important. It is not too much to say that the value of the instruction is very dependent upon its professional qualities and closeness. Aptness in supervisory leadership is not wholly dependent upon the same qualities which make for effectiveness in teaching. Then how are we to get adequate training and experience in a sufficient number of men and women to supply the needs? And how are we to treat superintendents, concerning functions, responsibilities, and compensation, so as to secure and retain true manliness and real womanliness, decorated with the qualities which vitalize professional leadership, and shorn of the attributes of mere schoolma'amishness, in supervisory positions?

To be a little more specific, what are to be the standard attainments of superintendents? How much are they to have to do with appointing or removing teachers, with framing courses of instruction, with adopting textbooks, with determining disputes, with regulating the progress of pupils, and with developing the morale, and spirit and power of the schools? How are they to be saved from humiliation by directors and trustees who have legal prerogatives but no knowledge of the delicate and perplexing matters involved in the administration upon modern lines of mixed and ambitious schools? How is there to be any supervision worthy of the name in the country districts? With the new means of transportation and communication, is it not pretty nearly time to eliminate the "rural school problem" altogether, to take a more advanced position

concerning the professional standing of the rural superintendent or commissioner, and to make supervisory districts in the farming sections of a size which will permit real superintendence and enable all the teachers to come in once a month and sit around a table for discussion and for instruction? Surely, these are unsettled questions which will have to be worked out slowly in the further evolution of our public school system.

### The size of school districts

The size of the school district in the farming regions has been much in discussion for several years. From the settlement of the country, the school district outside of the towns has been small enough to place a schoolhouse within walking distance of every home. To be sure the walk has often been a long one, but the whole world is relative and it has not seemed so long to those who had to make it as to the less hardy people in the cities. As fast as the country was settled, or the distance became impracticable by reason of new homes, another district was created and a new schoolhouse built. Now there is something of a movement to make larger districts and to consolidate districts, carrying the children to and from school when necessary, in order to have larger schools, more elaborate buildings, and graded courses of instruction. This movement has not, by any means, gone so far as to become a policy. Many arguments have been adduced in its favor. The ones opposed have not been much presented. They can not be fully brought forward here. But such questions as the following are surely not impertinent in this connection:

Are we altogether certain that a large school is better than a small one, or a graded than an ungraded one? Is not the essential difference in the teaching and in the supervision, and may not efficient instruction be assured in the small country district by a course less open to objection?

Is it, considering the exigencies of carriage and of weather, well to require young children to go farther from home than is imperative?

Is it better to centralize and complicate administrative machinery, with the necessary delegation of the authority for maintaining the schools from the people in primary assemblages to their representatives and officials, or to keep control as close to the people as possible and in the simplest forms compatible with efficiency? May not the district school be expected to meet the circumstances and the elementary needs of its immediate constituency very well indeed, and is not the matter of maintaining the schoolhouse and of providing for the modest expenses

of the schools likely to keep the people more interested in the schools than they will naturally be if the school is more remote and the measure of their control is lessened? Can not any real difficulty be met by continuing elementary schools as heretofore and by supplementing them by central high schools? Is it not better to continue the unit of district school administration as it prevails over large areas of the country, as far at least as local control over the location and the character of the building and providing for expenses are concerned, and by making a different unit for supervisory purposes which may be large enough to get a strong enough superintendent and yet not so large in miles as to make real supervision impracticable? Is not the real difficulty in the country politics and the size of the supervisory district and lack of professional control over the teacher and the teaching, rather than in the size of the school district? Is the location of an elementary school within the smallest practicable distance from every home, and the possession of a popular meeting place by the smallest hamlets and the crossroads regions, to be surrendered without the most imperative necessity or until it is clearly proved that the change of plan does not involve greater difficulties than any which are now pending? These interrogations do not necessarily negative the policy of consolidation but it seems to me that they are sufficient to suggest that it is very much within the zone of unsettled questions.

### Teaching as a vocation

There is at all times a sufficient supply of unsettled questions concerning the development of a uniformly virile teaching service, both in city and country. It must be said that teaching does not attract the larger number of forceful characters. The compensation is insufficient and the opportunities for distinction are held to be lacking. Men have very generally ceased to prepare themselves for teaching and the same is largely true of the more ambitious women. No one can question that the best interests of the teaching service claim as much of the masculine as of the feminine mind, beyond the primary schools at least. No one can doubt the need of the most aspiring women in the schools. Any great work among large numbers of both sexes requires the cooperative help of both men and women and of the strongest and most expectant men and women in the world. The ordinary conditions of the teaching service do not make for this. And there has been in recent years a remarkable educational development which, indirectly but strongly, opposes it. That is the expansion of the colleges and universities so as

to prepare for all of the professions, and the multiplying of vocations for educated and aggressive men and women. Moreover, the colleges, perhaps unintentionally, prepare for every other vocation better than for teaching, and their indirect influence is against teaching. University teachers are not very familiar with modern work in the lower schools, and the interests of their own special branches displace any serious concern for a unified organization or an all around service in the schools below. They are not only more interested in the pupils who are going to college than in those who are not, but also in the pupils who are headed for their departments more than in those who are likely to elect other branches for future study. All this is turning nearly all the men and many of the best women, who in other times would have looked to teaching as a vocation, to other work, and it is lessening the independence and effectiveness of the teaching force to a degree which is hardly compensated for by the larger knowledge of educational principles and the improved methods of the modern agencies for training teachers. The live question is—how are we to assure a teaching force which shall be free from specially defective factors and generally as capable and spirited and aggressive as that which manages the other great, though less important, intellectual activities of the nation? Always a pressing question, the growing importance and the growing difficulties of the subject make it more weighty now than at any previous time.

However important the form of the legal school organization, and however imperative the character of the men and women who teach the schools, there is nothing about the schools so vital and, it may also be said, so difficult, as a sound determination of what work the schools shall do.

The Minister of Education in other countries does not have a very hard time deciding what the primary schools shall do and how it shall be done. He does it alone. He follows either the law or long and unchangeable usage. The teachers are men and the tenure of position is for life. Every teacher obeys the Minister's directions without question. He has to provide a simple curriculum for children of the peasant class who expect to live exactly as their fathers have lived. The work is not to inspire children to do their best and rise to high places among their fellows; it is not to fit them for the work of advanced schools; it is to drill them to read and write and work, through very ordinary and dead-level lives. It satisfies the demands of the rather slow-going and monotonous life of the people whom these foreign schools serve.

It is wholly different in America. Our schools are not shaped and managed by a minister, a cabinet, or a monarch, but by the people. The common thought and general usage have settled the outlines of the system. Each community fills in the details and carries them as far as it will. Everybody has a proprietary interest in the schools. The administration is through popular elections, and changes in administration are frequent. Changes in the teaching force are frequent, also. There is not much resistive power. Every one with a project thinks the schools ought to carry it out. It is not so hard for one with a scheme to load it upon the schools as it is for an administrative officer or a teacher to keep it out. People who mean well, but who are without any grasp of the general problem, often turn the course of the schools aside from its ordinary and natural channel.

From the standpoint of school administration, every American child is bred in the purple. He is to have everything that the richest child in the world can have in the way of instruction if he will take it, and all of the fixed influences, direct and indirect, censure him if he neglects to take it. Every boy must infer from all he hears that he will be discredited unless he follows an exclusively intellectual pursuit, and every girl must believe that her happiness depends upon her becoming literary and knowing about art and the opera, and wearing silks and directing servants—when the silks are often elusive and always illusory and the servants are more elusive and illusory still.

All classes mix in our schools. As I passed a ward school the other morning I saw two little girls, whom I recognized, pass in at the same time. One was the daughter of a prominent officer of the state and the other was the daughter of my office messenger. The association was quite as good for the child in the higher social station as for the one in the lower. It will do something to keep the first sane. The second will be most influenced by the foibles and fancies rather than by the substance and the real graces of the other.

At the annual meeting in a little school district, both rich and rural, on Long Island, held the other day, the accomplished wife of one of the wealthiest men of the country whose name is familiar to all, and the village livery keeper were elected trustees of the district school. There was something of a contest and they were both supported by the same votes. The woman stood for something very decisive in the betterment of the school. It was an admirable result.

They will doubtless be of substantial service to each other and to the public in caring for the school. Each will surely learn something worth knowing from the other. In a common service they will be more tolerant of each other, and a rational service may lead two lots or "bunches" of people to see more that they like in each other than they had before realized. In an European school, or in the management of one, such associations would be wholly impossible and the manifest advantage would be absent. But the European political and educational systems are not intended to bind classes together or to give every one an equal chance with every other.

### The articulation of the schools

We have a continuous and pretty well articulated school system, from the kindergarten to the university. Teachers and children are continually enjoined to be thinking of the next school above. A teacher whose pupils do not *pass* is discredited. A child who does not *pass* is in peril of being eternally lost. This may not be really so dreadful to the individual teacher and the individual child, though each thinks it is. It may be as well to have some pressure as to have everything fall down and everybody become lackadaisical for the want of attention. But does it not inevitably attach more significance to the upper than to the middle schools? Does it not assume that the road to college and the road to glory are all the same?

And are they? No thinking man can doubt the self-satisfaction and enlarged intellectual enjoyment which commonly result from college training. No one will be disposed to deny the advantage which the liberally educated and disciplined mind has in severe mental work and particularly in intellectual combat. No one can fail to see how the higher institutions break out new roads and lead the thinking of the world to higher planes. And surely no school man can ignore the fact that the vitalizing, the energizing, and the steadying of the lower schools must necessarily come from the higher schools. But there are those who will deny that it is desirable that all children shall go to college. There are enough who do not think that it is better to have a college degree and admission to a profession, with little adaptation to it and little to do after it, than it is to master a manual vocation and have plenty to do. There are folks in the world who dare to suspect that many a one becomes really unbalanced and pretty nearly useless through college teaching and college study, when he might have been happy and useful if conditions and normal inclinations had been regarded and if he had found himself in a work where he could have had the reward and

the joy which come from accomplishing things. There are those who even venture to suspect that men and women with work which they love and the steadiness and balance and respect which they gain by doing it are safer citizens and more attractive characters than men and women who have been through the schools without being able to put the training of the schools to the doing of things which are of moment to the world.

It is not a matter of the value of the higher learning to the world at large; it is a matter of the power and purpose of each individual to make it of most use to himself. The unambitious or the incapable rich, who are not in danger of doing much anyway, may very well go to college, if they can be kept from ruining the colleges while there. The rich who have work and sand in them will ordinarily seize upon college training while they enlarge the substance and illustrate the point and power of it. The poor must balance values: they will coolly calculate the worth of it to any plans which they may have, or they will leave it to chance and take whatever the consequences may be. If there is something like a definite purpose in mind, if the college training is put to real use, the consequence will be a finished and resourceful character, and the harder the work and the more the sacrifices the stronger and the more dependable the character will be. If, however, there is no serious plan or purpose about it all, no power to appreciate and adapt the college training and discipline, the result will be a past master in dudism so long as one has the money to sustain the role, or a misfit and partial, or total, failure when one must earn his living.

The percentage of men who have reached the highest positions of leadership and influence without the training of the most advanced schools, as compared with those who have had that advantage, is surprisingly large. It is because they have had the stuff in them and it has been developed and seasoned in life. They have not depended upon books or been largely controlled by theories; they have squared their lives with the actualities of living; they have been both patient and aggressive; they have found the way to accomplish something worth while. It was something not set forth in books. But this has been suggestive to the college; and the courses of study, the characteristics of teachers, the methods of instruction, and the atmosphere of the places have been so radically modified in the interests of doing as against talking that, aside from the increased number of students who go to college, the advantages to the college man as against the other are very substantially enlarged. And, of course, with an independent, sane and balanced character, having the elements of strength and success anyway, the advantages of a college training can not be overestimated.

## Culture and citizenship

It is not true that good citizenship is gaged by the depth of culturing study or familiarity with philosophical theory. It rests upon the balanced sense which is the joint product of decent breeding, of familiarity with men and things, and of the labor which shows in things accomplished, either manual or intellectual, and in sweat upon the brow. The man who mends your shoes or makes your clothes is likely to average just as safe and potential a citizen as the one who tries to train your refractory stomach, the one who fills you up with economic theory, or the one who supplies theological deductions to your mystified soul. The one who produces physical results in life is certainly no less to be counted upon than the one who writes the more freely when he is not obliged to be troubled with any facts.

## The practical element in education

These considerations are at the bottom of the widespread criticism against our public educational system. Everybody worth considering knows that the mere ability to read and write is no adequate equipment for efficiency in our complex life, but everybody also knows that no system of training, no matter how elaborate, which leads inevitably to pursuits which are exclusively intellectual or only culturing will sustain our complex civilization. It is right here that the plan and scope of our Western universities, very largely state universities, are pushing them strongly to the front rank in American higher education. The feeling is very common that there is no sufficient reason why the courses of study and the influences of the lower schools should lead decisively to those higher institutions which are only culturing or professional, or to those departments of universities which are essentially so. There is a strong and justifiable sentiment that the work of the elementary and secondary schools does not support the industrial as well as the classical or professional departments in the universities which have provided for all phases of human learning. There is a strong and sustained sentiment that the elementary schools ought to do more for the pupils who are not going to college at all, if the advantages of our popular system of education are to be equal for all. And there is a decided and a justifiable belief that the elementary schools, taken as a whole, train for versatility more than for exactness, and that—either because of this or because they have been loaded with too much, or both—they do not turn out pupils who can do any definite thing very satisfactorily when they must go to work.

If I interpret the situation correctly, the common sentiment of the country fully sympathizes with the old line literary colleges. It feels that there is a place for them, and wishes them well. It has abundantly demonstrated its decisive support of university training in aid of the industries. But it demands that the elementary training shall lead more decisively to the industries and to business, whether pupils are going to the advanced schools or are going to work; and that the work of the lower schools shall be sufficiently concentrated and made sufficiently exact to support the expectation that pupils shall be able to read intelligently, write legibly, perform mathematical processes readily and correctly, and entertain serious notions of real work when they leave the schools. The objection is not that the schools do other things, but that they do not do these things before the other things, and that the result amounts to a discrimination against the industrial masses and the very ones who stand most in need of free education.

Then the whole question as to what the schools shall do is an open one. Apparently, they must have less, rather than more, to do. If not, then a large part of the children must have less. It would seem that there will have to be more differentiation of courses, with reference to future living. There will have to be more drill and more firmness of treatment in the purely elementary work, at least. The work will have to be adapted to years so that whenever a child leaves school he may be able to do very well what the world may justly expect of one of his age. There will have to be more exact attention to present actualities than to remote possibilities. It would not be strange if the lower schools were yet required to give every child not only the means of informing himself and of expressing himself, but also a definite trade or vocation through which he may earn a living. This would be doing less for the children who will never go to college than most of the larger towns are already doing for those who go to the high school, or than most of the states are already doing for the thousands who go to the state universities.

Here is the great, overwhelming and difficult question in American education. I surely could not settle it. We might discuss it in this congress for a month and we could not settle it. It is to be settled out of the abundant experience, the democratic purpose, and through the natural and logical unfolding of the free life of the nation.

## Nonattendance upon the schools

There is another unsettled question, and clearly a very serious one, to which I must advert. It has reference to nonattendance upon the schools. It will not do to assume that all in this free country who ought to go to school will do so. All parents are not anxious about their children's educational welfare. Some parents and children will wallow in ignorance unless they are punished for not taking advantage of the schools. And the worst of it is that the very common sentiment seems to be seriously indifferent to the compulsion.

The most recent data available to me shows the percentage of illiterate electors in England to be .009 per cent., and the percentage of illiterate recruits in the German army to be .05 per cent. In France 4.4 per cent of men and 6.3 per cent of women signed the marriage register with a cross. In Switzerland .33 per cent. of the men entering the military service were illiterate. The last report of illiterate conscripts in the army of Holland shows that it was 2.1 per cent. and in the army of Sweden it was .08 per cent.

Now, let us examine the figures of the United States census of 1900, showing the percentage of illiteracy among males of voting age in the United States. In the country at large it was 10.9 per cent. In the North Atlantic Division it was 6.8 per cent; in the South Atlantic Division it was 24.5 per cent; in the North Central Division it was 4.9 per cent; in the South Central Division it was 23.3 per cent, and in the Western Division it was 6.7 per cent. That is, in no one of these great divisions of our country is the showing so favorable as in any one of the countries I have named, and generally speaking it is so much worse as to shame us.

Take several typical states from East to West: in Massachusetts the percentage of illiterate potential voters is 6.4, in New York 5.9, in Ohio 4.8, in Illinois 4.8, in Iowa 2.7, in Nebraska 2.5, in Colorado 4.1, in Montana 6.1, in California 6.2 and in Oregon 4.8. Taking states from North to South: in Michigan it is 5.5, in Indiana 5.6, in Kentucky 18.8, in Tennessee 21.7, in Alabama 33.7 and in Georgia 31.6. In no American state is the showing so satisfactory as in England, in the German Empire, in Switzerland, in Holland, or in the Scandinavian countries.

I can not analyze and exploit this all-important subject here as I shall endeavor to do in another place at no distant day. But here it may be said that there is abundant evidence of a serious difficulty in the indifference of public sentiment or in the character of our educational legislation or in the execution of it. And

it may be added that, no matter how great our revenues or our energy or our genius for doing things, no matter how rich, how strong, how commercially successful we become, we shall not honor ourselves nor illustrate the advantage of democratic government to other peoples until as many of our people as of theirs are taught to read and write. Whether we can do it or not is a very large matter for American statesmen, and an unsettled and grave question in educational administration.

### The responsibility of the schools

There is still another matter pertinent to our subject, and with a reference to that I shall release your patient attention. There is a frequently expressed disposition to hold the schools responsible for about everything that goes wrong in the country. If there is an epidemic of crime, or an outbreak of objectionable business methods, or any other distinct evidence of widespread moral turpitude, or if all boys and girls are not more completely ready for a swifter and more complex life than was ever expected in all history before—the schools are taken to task for it.

Every step and every influence of the common schools make for character. It is true that religious instruction is not very common —not as common as it used to be—but it is also true that it is as common as denominational opposition will permit. There is nothing done that does not contribute to cleanness and decency in living, to exactness and correctness in thinking, and to refinement and trueness in feeling. Everything is done in these directions up to the very limits of opportunity.

It is a fundamental policy of this country that political officers shall not meddle with denominational instruction, and that ecclesiastical officers shall not bend the policies of the state to denominational ends. It is not because of any indifference to religion but because of the necessities of the case in a cosmopolitan population of freemen and in a state which is opposed to all favoritism and stands for equal and exact justice for all. This policy leaves religious teaching to the family and to the church, unless the universal consent invites the common schools to give it. And it seems to me that between the schools, and the churches with their auxiliary agencies, and the family life, the children are being trained in free religion and sound morals about as well as can be expected and quite as well as in any days of yore. Indeed, it seems to me that our democratic life and our free and rational teaching are developing a people with more of the elements of undefiled religion and with less of the factors which have burdened true religion than has been common in other lands and in other days. And in this the common schools are doing all

that the sound moral purpose of the country will sustain and all that the settled political theory of the country will permit.

But there is a difficulty, extended and discouraging, outside of the schools. It operates in spite of the schools. It grows out of the American disposition to place freedom above security, to protect liberty at all hazards, and take the chances of license and its consequences.

It seems to me that many of the common usages and some of the most conspicuous object lessons in the country make for dishonesty rather than integrity. An infinite number of people have become what once would have been thought exceedingly rich. When one becomes halfway rich he becomes money mad and resorts to methods for overreaching all the rest with an ingenuity and fiendishness which out-devils the Devil himself. There is lack of law and lack of prosecutors to stop him, and his success in gaining money by immoral methods and in keeping out of jail—through the help of astute lawyers and abhorrent forces—predisposes too many of the rest to copy his example. Some phase of this thing is everywhere in the land and it corrupts the life, particularly the young life, of the country. Are the schools responsible for that?

Again, the railroads are great educators. They educate us in much that is good, and also in much that is bad. They train us in promptness—and in evasiveness. The laws concerning them are not yet very well settled. They observe no moral restraints not fixed by law and they are past masters in the art of changing and evading the laws which they dislike. Men who are all that can be desired in their individual characters are often all that is undesirable in corporation service. But this is not all, and perhaps it is not the worst. They assume that everyone else will violate or evade the law if he dare. For example, they assume that everybody will steal from them, and, with something of a fellow feeling for those who do, the matter is soon dropped when they find it out. They closely inspect and often outrage honest people who board their trains. When they find one on their trains wrongfully, they put him off and that is the end of it. The decent folk resent the shabby treatment and are predisposed to retaliate, and the indecent folk get off so easily that they are predisposed to try it again. Upon an European railroad everyone is treated with politeness. It is assumed that one who boards a train has the right. If one is found on board without a ticket or money he is carried to the next station and put in jail. The road and the public prosecutors make punishment sure and severe. The honest people get decent treatment and the dishonest ones get the punishment they deserve. It educates in integrity more than we are accustomed to think. It is particularly impressive upon the ignorant and upon the young. If, then, native honesty, or

at least, correct living, is more common among the masses of an European than of an American city, are the American schools responsible for it?

Yet again, nothing is a legal crime until a statute makes it so. Criminal procedure rests upon legislative acts and not upon the common law. The regulation and punishment of crime is far from settled. It has not kept pace with the progress of the country. It is so dilatory and uncertain as to shame us. Money can defer punishment indefinitely except in the most flagrant and noted cases—and often, indeed, in those. Public officers charged with prosecutions are sometimes found dividing the plunder with thieves in consideration of immunity from punishment. The thing pervades our affairs broadly and makes a vicious impress upon many lives.

If business greed and cunning employ chemistry to cheapen food stuffs, and even medicines, by eighty or ninety per cent without lowering the cost to the buyer; if trustees enrich themselves at the expense of their trusts by having secret wheels within wheels; if there is no longer a standard of value for materials sold or service rendered except what "the traffic will bear" or what can be collected; and if the young or the inexperienced are misled or deceived by the everyday schemes of the prosperous or the rich which are violative of law or against good conscience and fair dealing, are the schools to be taxed with it all?

On my way over the mountains to make this address, I fell in with the superintendent of a California gold mine and, in my innocence, asked him how they prevented their gold from being stolen by workmen or marauders. He said there was no trouble at all, that the miners were as a rule exactly honest, and that if a thief got into camp he was in danger of disappearing between two days so completely that he never troubled anybody after that. The method is a little severe but it seems to be efficacious. Most people need to be surrounded and supported by a system which commends decent people and punishes the guilty. If keenness and overreaching have outrun law, if the slowness of our criminal procedure has caused it to pretty nearly break down before our swift and complex life, and if we can not or ought not employ gold mine methods to keep men straight, are the schools to be made the scapegoat of it all?

Here is a great matter outside of the schools which is unsettled and which will have to be settled. It is wholly unfair to charge any lack of moral character or of common honesty which may be discerned in the country to the plan and scope of the educational system. When the law is perfected and is observed, when all may know that it will be speedy and sure and equal in its application to all, the matter of correct living and of moral character in this coun-

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try seems likely to rest upon as sure a foundation country. The difficulty in this behalf seems to growth in population, in the overwhelming changes in manner of life, and in the backwardness of legal and administrative systems, rather than in fundamental political principles or in the plan and scheme of the schools.

The men and women of the schools are so accustomed to settle things that they are rather predisposed to shoulder all the burdens that are shied at them and determine all the hard problems that come up. The unsettled questions that are legitimately and necessarily upon us are many enough and heavy enough. If we throw back upon the country the hard nuts which are not ours at all, if we resent the constant attempt to use the schools for special ends, if we confine them to what they must do to vindicate our political and educational theories and justify the money they cost, we shall have quite enough to do. But we shall be able to do it. As some matters that are outside of the schools approach solution, the unsettled questions that are necessarily inside of the schools will settle more easily.

## Conclusion

The nation is just beginning to realize that the fundamental political principle which holds all men and women equal before the law, with the now well developed national policy which provides free instruction to the very limits of human knowledge to all who will come and take it, involve an expense of unexpected magnitude and present questions of unprecedented difficulty in organization and administration. But there will be no turning back. More cheerfully than the people meet any other tax, more cheerfully than any other people ever met any tax not vital to the national defense and the saving of life, the American people supply and will supply the funds for universal and liberal education. The difficulties will not be met in a year; they will never be settled in a corner. They will be solved by the rational projection of the political theories which are the inspiration and the guide of the nation's life. They will be met with courage and confidence, even with wit and enthusiasm. They will be settled through discussion, and yet more through experience. Not all that we plan will come to pass. The unexpected will often happen, and in time we are likely to see that the unexpected is better than the plan we made. The logically progressive purpose of our millions of freemen, the gradually unfolding scheme of our nation's mission in the world, advancing in accord with a plan that is more than human, will overcome difficulties and break out the roads for a sane and balanced system of education which will give most to the nation through the opportunity it will hold out and the encouragement it will give to every one.

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